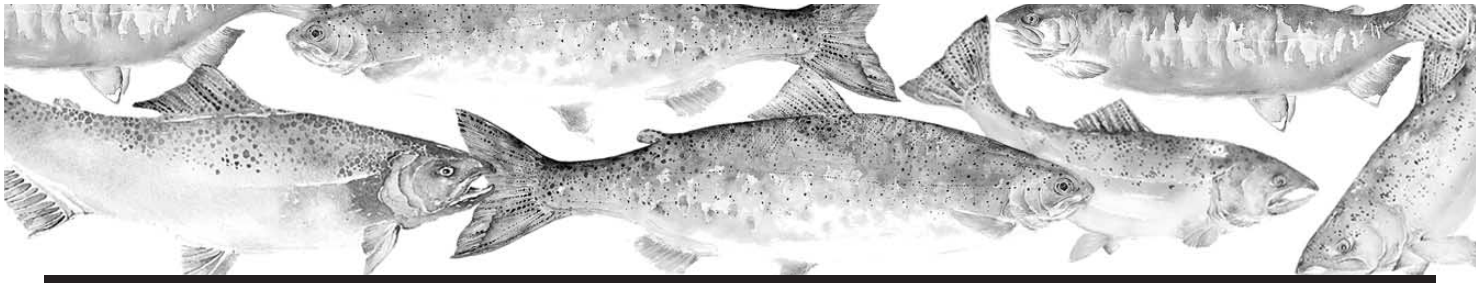
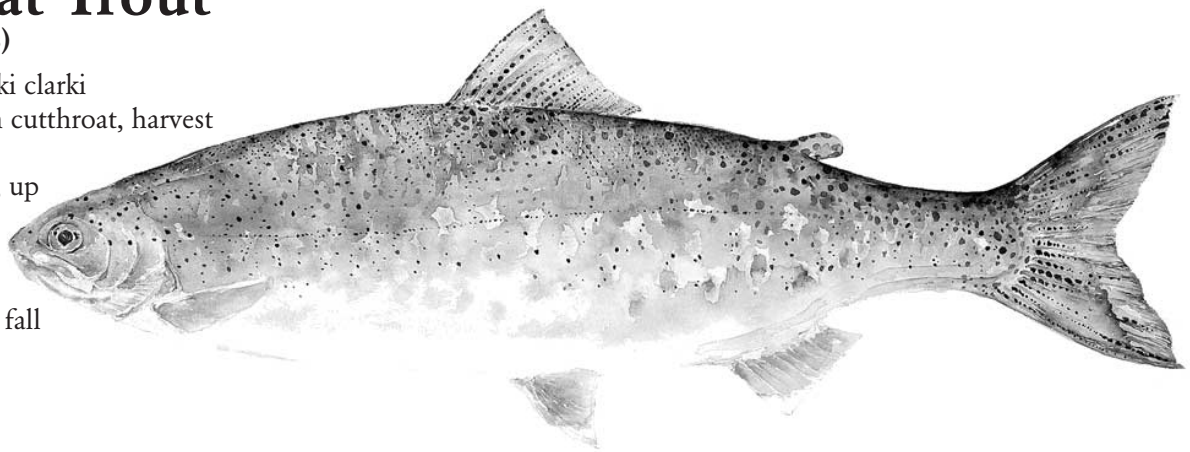


Clark County, Washington **Endangered Species Act** *Information*

# Cutthroat Trout

**(coastal subspecies)**

Oncorhynchus clarki clarki
*Other names:* sea-run cutthroat, harvest trout
*Average size:* 1-4 lbs, up to 6 lbs
Spring spawner: upriver migration in late summer and fall



Although cutthroat trout are not currently listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), they have been proposed for a threatened ESA listing. The listing would be administered by the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife. A decision on listing is expected at any time.

### What are coastal cutthroat trout?

Of the 13 subspecies of cutthroat trout indigenous to North America, only the coastal cutthroat is anadromous, living in both salt and freshwater during its life cycle. But coastal cutthroat have complex life histories, and not all fish are anadromous. In any given body of water, some may migrate to sea, while others become resident fish. In fact, the offspring of resident fish may migrate, while the offspring of anadromous fish may "residualize."

The native range of coastal cutthroat trout corresponds remarkably with the Pacific coast rainforest. They range as far north as Prince William Sound in Alaska and as far south as the Eel River of California. They migrate up the Columbia River approximately to the mouth of the Klickitat River.

### Life history

Sea-run cutthroat spawn over a long period, from winter through May. They seek smaller streams where the flow is minimal and the streambeds tend toward a sandy texture. They prefer to spawn in the uppermost portions of these streams, areas that are too shallow for most other anadromous salmonids.

Most cutthroat rear in-stream for two to three years before venturing into salt water. Emerging fry are less than an inch long and are poorly able to compete with larger coho and steelhead fry for resources. To compensate, cutthroat fry use headwaters and low-flow areas that coho and steelhead avoid. In these areas, cutthroat find their niche within the ecosystem.

Unlike other anadromous salmonids that spend multiple years feeding far out at sea, cutthroat prefer to remain within a few miles of where they were born. They do not generally cross large open-water areas. Some will overwinter in freshwater and feed at sea only during the warmer months. In rivers with extensive estuary systems, cutthroat may move around in the intertidal environment to feed. They may also run upriver or out to sea on feeding migrations. Protected estuaries are excellent cutthroat habitat.

### Why are healthy runs of wild salmonids declining?

As Clark County's human population has boomed, its fish population has plummeted. The relatively high numbers of returning salmon in 2000, while encouraging, should not be misinterpreted as a sign that everything is fine. Fish populations in our region have always fluctuated, but the overall trend continues downward. While natural phenomena such as flooding, predators, and ocean currents affect salmon populations, human activity poses by far the great-

est threat to salmon survival. The effects of human activity on fish populations have been many decades in the making and will take many decades to remedy. The four main areas of human activity that threaten salmon are known as the four Hs:

- **HARVEST:** Commercial and sports fishing directly reduce fish populations.
- **HATCHERIES:** Artificial production facilities produce domesticated fish that threaten the ability of wild fish to survive when they interbreed with the wild fish.
- **HYDROPOWER:** Dams block salmon migration up and down rivers and inundate fish habitat.
- **HABITAT:** Streams, rivers, estuaries, marine waters, and surrounding flood plains are being steadily degraded by human activities that increase soil erosion, reduce the amount of woody debris in streams, raise the water temperature, add contaminants to the water, decrease water flow, and create barriers to fish passage. Diminishing habitat and loss of habitat complexity increases vulnerability to predators.

For information about salmon recovery in Clark County, contact the Clark County Endangered Species Program at (360)397-2022 or www.saveoursalmon.com.